

Covid-19 derails gender equality gains



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In the lead up to International Women's Day on 8 March, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has released new findings on the impact of the coronavirus crisis on gender equality in Europe.

From job losses and reduced working hours to spikes in domestic violence and overwhelmed counsellors, the effects of the pandemic have hit women the hardest.

Severe job losses in women-dominated professions

During the first wave of the pandemic, employment for women reduced by 2.2 million across the EU. Women working in retail, accommodation, residential care, domestic work and clothing manufacturing suffered heavy job losses. They make up the bulk of the workforce in these sectors, and 40% of all jobs lost by women during the crisis were in these professions.

Despite rising employment in the summer, women gained only half as many jobs as men. This shows that the economic impact of the pandemic is having longer lasting effects for women.

"Europe will bounce back, as long as gender equality is front and centre of recovery measures. In a small win for gender equality, Member States will have to show how their economic recovery plans promote gender equality in order to access the EU's recovery fund. EIGE can help with that by providing gender statistics, which are crucial to understand the different effects of the pandemic on women and men and assess where the money is most needed," said Carlien Scheele, EIGE's Director.

Work-life balance pressures have increased for women

The pandemic has shown the potential of a digital workforce, but teleworking has also heightened work-life balance conflicts, especially for women with young children aged 0-5 years. Despite men taking on more care responsibilities than before, women's share of unpaid work has increased.

Online schooling represents a new form of unpaid care for parents, especially for women who are more involved in the virtual classroom with children. Our study shows that mothers have to deal with interruptions by children more often than fathers when teleworking. Constant distractions and extra care responsibilities for women lowers their productivity and could reduce their career progression and pay.

Inadequate support measures for domestic violence victims

The pandemic has also seen a rise in reports of domestic violence against women. During the first wave of lockdowns across Europe, shelter and counselling staff were overwhelmed due to increased demand. Staff often felt inexperienced to provide remote support and were worried about victim confidentiality.

Support services, such as shelters and counselling hotlines, need more funding from Member States to guarantee that victims have free, round-the-clock access to support. Declaring these services as "essential" is also important as it allows them to keep operating, even during lockdown. In order to be better prepared for a future crisis, action to combat gender-based violence needs to be part of a wider, long-term strategy on disaster and crisis prevention.

EIGE's report on the Covid-19 pandemic and intimate partner violence against women in the EU is out today.

For media enquiries, please contact Veronica Collins, +370 5 2157 449,
veronica.collins@eige.europa.eu

Further reading

[EIGE's resources on Covid-19 and gender equality](#) →

[EIGE's report on gender equality and the socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic](#) →

[EIGE's report on the Covid-19 pandemic and intimate partner violence against women in the EU](#) →

[Press release by the European Commission](#) →